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ABSTRACT

Noting that the research literature about father involvement is expanding at an exponential rate, this paper explores seminal ideas about father involvement in families. The paper is presented in three parts. The first part provides an overview of the emerging research on social fatherhood. This part traces the changes in the concept of fatherhood from a simple two-variable model (i.e., father absence has a negative influence on children) to the more sophisticated constructs of father involvement that focus on how fathers enact the parenting role. The second part of the paper explores compelling lines of research that relate to several primary features of father involvement, such as the contexts of interaction, father's motivations, and the mechanisms of enactment. The third part presents a short overview of family process ideas. Future research directions are suggested, and calls for more systematic theory building around the fathering role. (Contains 157 references.) (Author/KB)

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WP-98-12B
December 1998

by

Randal D. Day
Washington State University

Commissioned by the

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PREFACE

Not since the 1960s and 1970s—when research in the field was at a peak—have family issues captured as much attention or sparked as much wide-scale debate as they have in recent years. Casting its net to address a variety of problems that fall outside the typical domains of psychology and sociology (where much of the early work was located), research on families is part of a growing interdisciplinary focus which is no longer simply implicated in questions about family development. Rather, the present interdisciplinary focus of the field attempts to respond to massive changes in the needs, structures, poverty levels, and formation patterns of families and the policies that are designed to remedy the increasingly complex problems they face.

A significant and compelling part of research on families over the past 20 years explores the impact of father involvement and father absence on children's development and complements much of the existing research on issues in other areas—e.g., female-headed households, poverty, social welfare, and public policy. In particular, the potential impact of family support legislation, national welfare reform agendas, and persistent systemic problems at local and state levels lends a sense of urgency to the research discussion about father participation in families. What is noticeably lacking in these discussions, however, is a focus on programs that serve fathers and families and the voices of practitioners.

The issues defining and surrounding research and practice on fathers and families are complex. Nested in each issue are multiple layers of questions about the problems facing young fathers, mothers, and families; the needs of programs and the practitioners who work in them; changes in national, state, and local policies; and the nature of the tasks facing society. Although there is substantial discussion about the impact of father absence, research studies provide only modest evidence for the negative consequences of father absence on children and typically attribute these negative effects to reduced family income resulting from separation or divorce. There are only sparse data on families that deviate from "traditional, intact" family forms such as families headed by adolescent or young, adult never-married, and/or poor mothers. Research on families of color, outside of poverty studies, is still conspicuously meager in the knowledge base.

The work of the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) uses the strengths and voids in these research discussions as a launching pad to develop a framework for research, practice, and policy—to promote the building of a field in which the needs of children and families are the core of the discourse and research and practice cohere to craft the language and activities associated with that discourse. NCOFF aims to bring together these issues within a research and collaborative effort on behalf of children and their families.

Established in July 1994 with core funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by

facilitating the effective involvement of fathers. Developed in the spirit of the Philadelphia Children's Network's (PCN) motto, "Help the children. Fix the system.", NCOFF seeks to increase and enrich the possibilities for children, ensuring that they are helped and that the system allows for and encourages the participation of fathers in their children's lives. NCOFF shares with PCN and other field activities the premises that children need loving, nurturing families; that mothers and families in general need to be supported in providing nurturance; and that family support efforts should increase the ability of both parents and adults within and outside the biological family to contribute to children's development and well-being.

NCOFF's mission is developed around seven *Core Learnings*. The Core Learnings provide the context for NCOFF's research agenda. This research agenda is intended to support the field in the development, conduct, and advancement of research, practice, and responsive policies. Research activities are designed to synthesize work from multiple disciplines, provide current analyses, and examine emerging conceptualizations in the field. In this and all of its work, NCOFF recognizes that the scope of need in the field requires a variety of approaches and the commitment and collective effort of different communities.

This Monograph is intended to highlight critical and emerging topics in the field that have received minimal attention and that complement issues identified in the NCOFF FatherLit Database, Briefs, critical literature reviews, and research reports. The Database combines citation lists, annotated bibliographies, and abstracts of research articles, reports, and volumes that focus on issues implied in the Core Learnings. All NCOFF documents are written and reviewed by scholars representing multiple disciplines and research interests in fathers and families. Information about the NCOFF Database, the literature reviews and analyses, working papers, and other NCOFF documents and activities is currently available on HandsNet and through our website.

Embedded in NCOFF's mission is a vision in which fathers, families, and communities are positioned to ensure the well-being of children and are able to translate their hope and the possibilities that accompany that hope into human and social prosperity. A well-coordinated national effort on fathers and families will give support and a collective voice to programs, encourage research, and contribute to responsive policy formulation. Such a vehicle would provide the appropriate context for experience-sharing among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; identification of basic research, program, and policy-related issues; surfacing of new research issues; and increased opportunities for communication, cooperation, and collaboration.

Vivian L. Gadsden
Director

SEVEN CORE LEARNINGS

- Fathers care — even if that caring is not shown in conventional ways.
- Father presence matters — in terms of economic well-being, social support, and child development.
- Joblessness is a major impediment to family formation and father involvement.
- Existing approaches to public benefits, child support enforcement, and paternity establishment operate to create systemic obstacles and disincentives to father involvement. The disincentives are sufficiently compelling as to have prompted the emergence of a phenomenon dubbed "underground fathers"—men who acknowledge paternity and are involved in the lives of their children but who refuse to participate as fathers in the formal systems.
- A growing number of young fathers and mothers need additional support to develop the vital skills to share the responsibility for parenting.
- The transition from biological father to committed parent has significant developmental implications for young fathers.
- The behaviors of young parents, both fathers and mothers, are influenced significantly by intergenerational beliefs and practices within families of origin.

The seven Core Learnings are at the heart of NCOFF's agenda for research, practice, and policy and are a framework for the field. They represent the knowledge and experience of practitioners who confront complex problems facing fathers and families and are consistent with research across multiple disciplines. They offer an important lens through which policymakers might learn more about the implications and impact of legislation and policy decisions on the lives of large numbers of fathers, mothers, children, and families. Within them are captured salient issues experienced and felt deeply by a range of fathers and families—from those who are financially secure to those who are the most vulnerable to poverty and hardship.

The Core Learnings were identified immediately prior to NCOFF's inception by frontline practitioners in a series of survey and focus group activities conducted by the Philadelphia Children's Network and NCOFF. Formulated first as seven hypotheses drawn from practitioners' experiences in programs serving fathers and families, each hypothesis was tested against existing published research and policy studies. As each hypothesis was borne out in the literature, it became a Core Learning. A library of information was developed for each. The resultant seven libraries now constitute the NCOFF FatherLit Database and include over 7,000 citations, annotations, and abstracts of research, available in written, diskette, and electronic form.

National Center on Fathers and Families

Social Fatherhood: Conceptualizations, Compelling Research, and Future Directions

by Randal D. Day

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, the paper provides an overview of the emerging research on social fatherhood. This segment traces the changes in the concept of fatherhood from a simple two-variable model (i.e., father absence has a negative influence on children) to the more sophisticated constructs of father involvement that focus on how fathers enact the parenting role. Second, it explores compelling lines of research which relate to several of those primary features of father involvement. For example, the contexts of interaction, father's motivations, and the mechanisms of enactment are examined. Third, within the category of mechanisms for enactment, it presents a short review of family process ideas. Future research directions are suggested and a call is made for more systematic theory building about the fathering role.

The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) is a policy research center that is practice-focused and practice-derived. Based in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by facilitating the effective involvement of fathers in caring for, supporting, and advocating on behalf of their children. NCOFF's research plan is developed around seven "Core Learnings," distilled from the experiences of programs and agencies serving fathers, mothers, and children around the country.

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About the Author

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Social Fatherhood: Conceptualizations, Compelling Research, and Future Directions

by Randal D. Day

The overall purpose of this paper is to explore seminal ideas about father involvement in families. This paper is one of several that have been written recently in an attempt to inform researchers, policymakers, and practitioners about the effects of father involvement on children's lives. The paper is not meant to present a comprehensive bibliography of fathering research but to provide a review of compelling concepts essential to our understanding of fathers' contribution (or lack thereof) to family life.

The body of literature about father involvement is expanding at an exponential rate. As with all such literatures, the father involvement/fatherhood/fathering research comes in varying degrees of quality. This paper is an attempt to extract from that body of knowledge the theories, ideas, and findings that are the most sound, useful, and productive.

The paper is divided into several parts. First, a brief *historical overview* of the research on fathering is presented. This overview outlines a transition from research that is presence/absence-oriented to a "social fatherhood" model that looks at positive father involvement as a much more complex construct. Next, several important research findings are presented. Finally, a series of research questions are suggested which propose some important future research directions.

Social Fatherhood

In recent years, researchers and practitioners have generated many ways of defining father involvement. These definitions (whether explicit or implicit) are often shaped by debates about what family life means in contemporary society (Bahr & Bahr, 1996; Berscheid, 1996; Beutler, Burr, Bahr, & Herrin, 1989; Delaisi de Parseval & Hurstel, 1987; Edwards, 1989; Griswold, 1993; Jurich, 1989; Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1993). At issue is the significance that is placed on the various ways a child can be connected to a male. Men and children can be associated by blood, by marriage, or by less formally committed relationships between the man and the children's mother. It is also possible to categorize the types of ties according to two elements: (1) ties that are based on legal bonds and (2) ties based on emotional connection. Thus, a man can have a blood tie to a child, along with a strong or weak emotional connection. A genetic relative or a man with a significant relationship with the child's mother may be socially/emotionally integrated into the child's life.

Blankenhorn (1995, p. 10), in commenting on the biological connection children have to fathers, compared the image of today's father to a shattered piece of glass. He says about the biological father looking at the shattered remains, "Off to one side, looking

nervous, is an emaciated fellow we must now call a biological father, filling out forms and agreeing to mail in child-support payments. Off to the other side is some guy experts now call a social father, wondering what to do next and whether he wants to do it" Blankenhorn (1995, p. 10). One of the major themes of Blankenhorn's best-selling book is that "real fathers" have a much greater chance of having a significant impact on the child than does "some guy the experts now call a social father." The argument presented is that the biological father is the key, irreplaceable connection and the one that has more potential to make a significant contribution to the child's well-being than a non-genetically connected male parent. Those who propose this approach argue that the United States is at high risk because there are so many biological fathers who have abandoned their children and have been replaced by men who do not have the same ability to influence a child's life (or replaced by no man at all).

William Marsiglio (1998) is one researcher who has suggested that social fathers are often a significant and valuable resource in children's lives. He suggests that attention should be given to men who have an important relationship with a child. These social fathers potentially have a critical and relatively permanent social/emotional connection with the child and this association exists regardless of biological or even legal ties to the child.

In the present paper, it is maintained, based on lack of evidence to the contrary, that a man's social/emotional connection to a child is more critical to the child's well-being than his biological connection. This distinction is particularly important considering that more children today are born out of wedlock and more people divorce and remarry than in times past. There is no clear evidence that the biological father can contribute to the well-being of a child in a way that a non-biological father cannot. It is true that the biological parent may contribute to a genetic behavioral predisposition. However, if we focus unduly on the genetic predisposition of the child, we would be forced to conclude that few if any social programs would matter much in changing the child's actions. The purpose of this paper is to explore the aspects of the child's world that we have some chance of influencing. In the child's given world, it is the social father who has the greatest chance of making a contribution.

The Emerging Emphasis on Social Fatherhood

When solid research data are combined with the power of an ideological movement *(and* that occurs within an historical moment in which the issues mean billions of dollars to policymakers), an irresistible force is generated. Scholars, private and government funding agencies, policymakers, and program delivery brokers have converged on the notion that understanding more about fatherhood is an essential key in unlocking such problems as children in poverty and high crime rates among adolescents.

Research about fathers has undergone several changes in the past 50 years. From 1940 through the late 1970s fatherhood researchers

focused primarily on sex-role issues. Essentially, researchers wanted to know how important paternal masculinity was to the social/ psychological well-being of boys, in particular (*cf.* Lamb, 1998, p. 9). In this research a simple design was employed in which the researchers sought to establish the correlational relationship between masculinity of fathers and their male children. It was thought that the father was the primary instrument in shaping the psyche of children through attachment (Biller, 1971; Lamb, 1981b). It was assumed that as men were more involved in children's lives, they would transmit their level of masculinity to their boys. However, researchers were able to show only weak and unconvincing correlations between the masculinity scores of fathers and their boys (Mussen & Rutherford, 1963; Lamb, 1997). And subsequent research led investigators to the notion that perhaps it was the relationship the father developed with the child (rather than his masculinity) that was the key to the child's well-being quotient. A major finding of this time period was that boys were more likely to pattern their sex-role identity on the norms of their culture when there was a strong father-son relationship (Biller, 1971; Lamb, 1971; Radin, 1981).

During the 1970s and part of the 1980s a relatively small handful of scholars (e.g., Lamb, Biller, Pleck, Parke, etc.) pursued the investigation of fathers' role in children's psychological well-being from a developmental/ attachment perspective. Most of this research focused on younger children and infants. Some of this research was motivated by two important cultural/sociological phenomena: (1) rising divorce rates and (2) the (re-)entry of women into the workplace. Researchers began asking the question: Does father absence (particularly because of divorce) have deleterious effects on the child? Researchers attempted to examine the impact of father absence by simply computing the difference between the well-being of children who lived in father-present families and the well-being of those with absent fathers. They then labeled these differences "father effects" (Biller, 1974, 1981, 1993; Herzog & Sudia, 1973). However, it was soon realized that father presence/absence was really a marker for other important familial processes. For example, several researchers discovered that the primary effect of divorce on children was not father absence *per se* but the difficulty of a single parent trying to do the job of two people (Maccoby, 1977). When there is only one parent available to assist with homework, chores, activities, and home management, that parent struggles to get it all done. The gender of the parent seems less relevant than does the number of parents available to do the monitoring and managing.

Researchers next discovered that father absence was frequently accompanied by economic stress (Pearson & Thoennes, 1990), and such economic stress precipitated emotional distress. The emergent divorce literature demonstrated that children of divorce experienced stress from several sources. First, they felt abandoned and were negatively influenced by pre- and post-divorce conflict (Amato, 1993; Amato & Keith, 1991). Second, the economic stress of residing in a single parent

home created its own set of struggles and problems. Third, the level of family conflict and turbulence in single parent families appeared to be an issue. The topic of sex-role identification began to take a back seat to these important issues of stress, economic deprivation, and conflict. Many began to wonder if having a male present in the home was perhaps *not* a key feature after all in understanding overall family stability. However, there was still not a clear connection to public policy and, therefore, research about father involvement still received only passing interest in the research and intervention communities.

Beginning in the late 1970s, researchers and social analysts (*cf.* Mackey & Day, 1979; Day & Mackey, 1986) noted that men were often portrayed in popular and professional venues as deficient in family life. While there was very little evidence to confirm that men were, in fact, emotionally, psychologically, and/or physically absent from the lives of children, the prevalent cultural message in movies, cartoons, and television programs was that men were "Dagwood Bumsteads," ineffective, bumbling, stumbling, not capable of meaningful interaction (Day & Mackey, 1986). While there was little evidence for assuming that men were negligent and derelict as portrayed, the message was strong and unrelenting.

Additionally, in the 1970s another message emerged which suggested that fathers could be (and should be, if given the opportunity) warm, loving, responsible parents. For example, in the movie *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Ted Kramer's wife leaves him in charge of his seven-year-old boy. The movie portrays Ted's "coming out" as a father. He begins as a bumbling, stumbling Dagwood Bumstead parent and gradually changes into a caring and dynamic father who fights for the custody of his child. Fathers' rights groups have used such images to suggest that the father can and should be considered a relevant parent.

Many began to question the notion that mothers should be the primary parent of choice, if a choice between father and mother has to be made. Some suggested that fathers are treated unfairly within the legal system with regard to divorce laws, payment of child support, custody battles, and property distribution (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993). Research and popular discourse during the late 1980s and early 1990s touted the notion that children, families, and men themselves were suffering because men were being systematically removed from the inner family life. Men's movements (e.g., Promise Keepers, Million Man March, and National Fatherhood Initiative) for the most part projected an emotional appeal to a traditional nuclear family where two (heterosexual) parents were encouraged to increase their "responsible parenting."

While moderately successful, this ideological approach (which has sometimes been supported by data) has served more as an emotional appeal than as a specific policy-sensitive plan for action. While there is strong criticism of the rhetoric used by these groups (*cf.* Bertoia & Drakich, 1993), the voice of fathers' rights groups has been heard. That voice has become one of the factors responsible for the

rising interest in fathering issues.

Most family research defines family structure by examining the state of "intactness": that is, intactness is often defined as whether both biological parents are present in the household. By the 1990s most family researchers began to note the dramatic increases in the number of households headed by females. This phenomenon was accompanied by steep increases in the number of children living in poverty (Hernandez, 1993; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Non-intact families are usually defined in terms such as biological-father absent, non-biological-father present or absent, or simply single parent household (Amato, 1987; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). It also has been noted that episodes of single parenthood (for single parenthood is often transitional) and poverty are disproportionately experienced by African American families (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). Among white families comparatively few (19.5%) report, at any one time, that they are single parent. By contrast, nearly 58% of African American families are single-parent households, with an estimated 64% of all African American children living in a single parent family (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Of course, the extremity of these numbers automatically alerts us to the attendant poverty figures for African American families. In 1995, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (1997) reported that 62% of African American children (predominately living in female-headed, single parent families) lived in poverty.

With this important national context in mind, researchers and policymakers began to wonder if bringing fathers back into families could reverse these devastating trends. Economists and policy researchers wanted to know if state and federal family-related policies somehow created disincentives for fathers to be present in the lives of their families. In addition, by the mid-1990s it became clear that welfare assistance to families was headed for a significant and dramatic change. Those who were ideologically motivated to champion the issues of fatherhood saw an unparalleled window of opportunity to bring the topic of fatherhood to the fore. The research community proposed that father research could be an important link in understanding child well-being.

Moving Beyond Paternity Establishment and Absence/Presence

Those who have sought to understand the intricacies and nuances of fatherhood have come from a variety of ideological stances, perspectives, and disciplines, ranging from academic psychology and sociology to Christian and Muslim ideological movements (Marsiglio, 1998, Committee on Conceptualizing Male Parenting, 1997; Blankenhorn, 1995; Gershenson, 1983; Popenoe, 1996). But regardless of the ideology, there are two central constructs that drive much of the research on fathering. The first is labeled "paternity establishment" and is often used in research about fatherhood and teen pregnancy, child economic well-being, and issues of custody. The second construct is the bifurcated definition of families as father-absent vs. father-present.

Research indicates that an increasingly large percentage of biological fathers either voluntarily or reluctantly disengage from their non-resident children's lives, leaving a gap for other non-biological fathers to fill (Furstenberg, 1988, 1995). That scenario is being acted out with increasing frequency as non-marital births and divorce involving children remain at relatively high rates. The phenomenon has prompted many researchers, theorists, and legal scholars to explore the role of the genetic/ biological father in a host of sensitive familial issues.

Often in this type of research, a simple two-variable model design is employed in which the assumption is made that father absence is harmful to the child in psychological (i.e., Freudian identity orientations), social, or financial ways. Common outcome variables in this research are psychological distress, increased delinquency, or changes in general social competence (e.g., school performance, friend-making, relationship-building). The result is research that is concentrated on one premise: that when fathers are absent the well being of the child decreases. The typical fathering study (until very recently) involved identifying a child outcome (e.g., school performance or delinquency rates) and then comparing families with a father present to families with a father absent. The difference between the two is typically attributed to father absence. This simple two-variable approach did not provide the rich explanations of family process that researchers sought.

More recently, (Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1985; Lamb, 1997; Palkovitz, 1997; Marsiglio, 1997; Committee on Conceptualizing Male Parenting, 1997) family researchers have suggested that genetic paternity and simple presence/absence are only parts of a much larger picture. In particular, Lamb, Pleck, and Levine (1985) were prescient in their proposal that father involvement needed a more substantial definition. They suggested that fathering involves more than just presence but *interaction, accessibility,* and *responsibility*. From that sharp turn in our collective thinking about fatherhood came many attempts to expand and elaborate on the definitions of the fathering role and how that role affects children.

By the mid-1980s theorists and clinicians began thinking about involvement instead of presence/absence. Led by such scholars as Lamb, Pleck , and Levine (1985); and Radin (1994) the research community tried to understand what resident fathers do (i.e., child care and engagement) and how those paternal efforts make a difference in the family system and in child well-being outcomes. The key difference in this research is that researchers began to focus on social fatherhood and father-child relationships and shifted their focus away from biological fatherhood and absence/presence issues. While the proximal relationship of the father is still an important element, it is the quality of the involvement along with his proximity that is the more essential construct. One could extend this model farther and suggest, as did Pleck (1987), that understanding involvement and proximity is not as important as understanding and promoting "positive involvement." In other words, it is not enough to know whether the father

is merely present and it is not enough to know if he is involved. Researchers now wanted to know what it is that fathers could do to create positive and efficacious relationships with children resulting in higher levels of child well-being.

Within that framework, a new group of important studies emerged, many of them with mutually confirming results. For example, researchers found that when fathers are highly engaged in the lives of children, these children have more cognitive competence, better self-efficacy scores (self monitoring and self-esteem), and better locus of control results (Radin, 1982, 1994; Pleck, 1997). Researchers also noticed that when two parents are highly involved, the children are more likely to develop appropriate sex-stereotypic role behavior, are more likely to model good problem-solving when they see two people working out the problems of life, and benefit from having the second parent available to direct school and other learning activities (Radin, 1982, 1984). However, as Lamb and Pleck (*cf.* Pleck, 1997) frequently restate, the presence or even involvement of a second parent is not nearly as important as the attitude and quality of the existing family interactions. Amato (1993) and Amato and Keith (1991) buttress that argument and note that children suffer when there is hostility and conflict in the family.

Lamb (1987) suggested that researchers be more precise when they define father involvement (i.e., engagement, accessibility, and responsibility) and not be overly swayed by ideological trends that blur our vision about what parents are actually doing with their children. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s ideological proclamations about the arrival of the "new" fatherhood shaped popular and scholarly perceptions that a new age of fathering had arrived. Some researchers, however, (*cf.* LaRossa, 1988) warned that most men were going about the business of parenting as per usual and spending only a fraction of the time that women were in essential parenting tasks.

While past research focused on easily measured marker variables (such as biological paternity and/or residential presence/absence as gross measures of fatherhood), the expanded view of social fatherhood forces us to consider the wider range of activities and dimensions which characterize paternal involvement as outlined in current research (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987; Palkovitz, 1997). Theoretically, this conceptual advance enriches our understanding of social fatherhood, as we begin to capture the sundry ways in which fathers influence their children.

Paternal Involvement as Responsibility

In the above section, it has been noted that researchers have come to believe that fatherhood in general and father involvement specifically are complex issues. There are a host of social science professionals who have examined the fathering role and most have unique ways of defining father involvement. A key definition of father involvement is captured in a paper by Marsiglio, Day, and Lamb (forthcoming) in which they state that studying father involvement is really a matter of examining responsible fathering. As in a few other discussions of father responsibility (*cf.*

discussion of generative fathering by Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Snarey, 1989), this formulation of father responsibility includes more than time allocation spent in a role, more than presence and more than emotional connection to the child. Responsibility includes motivational factors associated with active positive paternal involvement (Pleck, 1997). Levine and Pitt (1995, p. 5-6) state that a responsible man is one who:

> 1. Waits to make a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support his child.
> 2. Establishes his legal paternity if and when he does make a baby.
> 3. Actively shares with the child's mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child(ren), from pregnancy onwards (or is willing to assume these responsibilities on his own if the mother does not wish to be involved).
> 4. Shares with the child's mother in the continuing financial support of their child, from pregnancy onward (or is willing to assume these responsibilities on his own if the mother does not wish to be involved).

Responsible fatherhood involves a wide array of activities. Lamb and his colleagues (1987) suggest that paternal involvement be specified in categories such as economic support, social/ emotional support of the mother, and direct interaction with children.

The Contexts

There are a variety of contexts within which men enact the role of social fatherhood. These contexts include a mixture of structural, ethnic, gender, community and life-course factors that direct the father's motivations and how he enacts the fathering role. His performance of the father role must be examined in the light of an ever-changing and diverse culture. The diversity of residency and lifestyle/life-course compositions suggests that our perceptions about fathers' roles may be incomplete when the richness of multiple contexts is not considered (Gerson, 1993; Griswold, 1993; Marsiglio, 1995b). According to Marsiglio (1998), one of the most significant contexts that needs to be addressed is the change in actual structure of what we think of as a family unit. Each context transforms how fathers perform the parenting role. For example, the structural changes discussed below alter how fathers perceive that role, define its components, and respond to the expectations that attend social fatherhood. Contexts can be seen as an intervening process.

Structural changes. Compared to a few years ago a decreasing proportion of children live in a home in which there is a father (biological or non-biological) present (Bianchi, 1995; Mintz, 1996). At no time in U.S. history have so many children had their biological fathers living elsewhere. A wider variety of family structures are prevalent today than ever before. For example, it is very common for a child growing up in the 1990s to have a stepfather living with him or her on a regular basis. Many experience irregular contact with their biological and/or stepfather as the boundaries of families change frequently during the course of a child's time at

home. In addition, growing numbers of men are choosing to assume the role of custodial parent (Eggebeen, Snyder, and Manning, 1996; Marsiglio, 1995c). This diversity of structural contexts for fathering in and out of the home over the life-course of a child is changing the definition of the father's role. A father may not have the luxury of defining his paternal role in terms of a single unchanging concept. Instead, an increasing number of fathers are asked to rethink that role several times during their lives. A man may begin as a biological, in-home father but then have to change that role to out-of-home, distant father, then alter the father role again as he becomes a stepfather while yet maintaining contact with his original birth children.

Also, shifting family structures often require children to redefine primary relationships with their families. Children struggle as they rethink and sometimes realign loyalties and affections as new men come into the family. For some children, they may repeat that process as re-divorce occurs. And these changes in relationships often happen in the context of decreasing financial well-being, changes in work schedules, and household realignments.

Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, and Buelher (1993) have made an important theoretical contribution to our understanding of these structural changes and how they modify men's ability and willingness to perform the father role. In their paper, these authors illuminate the processes whereby fathers must make choices following divorce and remarriage. They theorize that fathers' effectiveness and willingness to expend time, money, and other resources on their children are a function of several factors. They also systematically build a mid-range theoretical framework that takes one aspect of fathering (i.e., structural changes in paternal contact following divorce and remarriage) and gathers together an array of propositions that flow therefrom.

For example, the authors theorize that when the structural changes occur (e.g., divorce, remarriage, etc.), fathers will make the choice to enact the father role in more efficacious ways when father status is more salient than other statuses. Said differently, fathers must perceive that their role is central and important relative to other role commitments. Second, a father will increase his level of enactment following structural changes if the significant others in his world encourage the continuance of that role. Third, when the father role is enmeshed with other identities he is more likely to continue the role following structural changes. When his religion promotes paternal responsibility he is more likely to remain active in that role. Fourth, he is more likely to remain an active father when the rewards of doing so outweigh the costs. In many situations the financial and emotional costs of continued enactment far outweigh the benefits. The authors' assumption is that men's role following structural changes can be shifted in ways that ameliorate the economic, social, and emotional impact of separation.

Racial/ethnic contexts. The context of race/ethnicity and family structure are inextricably tied to economic issues. Economic marginality does not happen randomly, but instead is closely linked to cultural and racial determinants. High rates of unemployment

among African American fathers coupled with lower educational standing and earlier age at first intercourse help create long-term poverty situations for a vast proportion of African American children (McLanahan & Booth, 1988; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Day, 1995). Children from lower-income homes where fathers are absent are more likely to have poor academic performance, lower educational attainment, and earlier pregnancy, all conditions which are associated with overall income loss and higher rates of poverty in later adult life (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; McLindon, 1987). It has been noted further that lost income also is magnified by gender and racial discrimination and that African American women are at special risk for poverty (McLoyd, 1990).

Single mothers of any race have high poverty rates in the U.S. (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). However, when the mother is African American, she is more than twice as likely as a Euro-American mother to be poor (Dickerson & Stanfield, 1995; Edelman, 1987). As Hernandez (1997) points out, however, the rise in single parent homes is a proximate cause of childhood poverty but at the root of that connection is the lack of employment security and low earnings of the men associated with those families. Additionally, he demonstrates that mothers' employment "has become increasingly important in determining childhood poverty and trends, both directly because of the income mothers bring into the home and indirectly by facilitating separation and divorce" (Hernandez, 1993: p. 33).

Cross-Cultural contexts. Ishii-Kuntz (1994;1995) has provided an important cross-cultural view of fatherhood. Her body of work (Ishii-Kuntz, 1992; 1993; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992a; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992b) shows important differences between U.S. and Japanese fathers. She has found that American fathers spend more than twice as much time with their sons as do Japanese fathers. However, she found no such difference in the amount of time spent with daughters. Overall, Japanese men spend a little more time with their daughters than with their sons. Ishii-Kuntz reports that Japanese men feel a great loss when their daughters marry because they have "lost" them to another family. It is the sons who form the extended kinship relations and remain connected to the family of origin. She also has found that an important bonding link between fathers and children in Japan is breakfast. Because Japanese men work later than American men, they use the morning as a time to maintain and build family relationships. When measuring the enactment of the fathering role, it is not enough simply to score the number of hours spent with a child. Finding out where and how those hours are spent can provide an enriched understanding of these important processes.

Finally, Ishii-Kuntz (1995) has shown that understanding the mother-child relationship is an important feature of paternal involvement. She found that Japanese mothers tend to create an image of the work-absent father as highly authoritative and demanding, much more than the fathers themselves report. Many researchers are beginning to realize that the process of parenting reflects the dyadic relationship between

the mother and father.

Life-course contexts. It is generally assumed that life-course trajectories are an inevitable part of our existence. Over time, family structures change, individuals develop and mature, and communities alter their expectations as norms and values change. The principle of morphogenesis (Day, Gilbert, Settles, and Burr, 1995) suggests that there is an unavoidable push for individuals and families to change and adapt. At the same time, however, the principle of morphostasis suggests that families and individuals struggle against change and try to keep things as they always have been. Thus, the fathering role must be understood as evolving between the power of these two forces, always changing yet retaining constant elements. To date, researchers have not taken on the task of helping us understand the nature of this struggle. We know very little about how men perceive the role of fatherhood as they get older, have more children, and experience changes in their families and in the communities in which they live (Gadsden & Hall, 1996).

Gender and fathering issues. Important to the discussion of research on fatherhood is a discussion of how gender is viewed in this research literature. As one looks back at the ever increasing mass of research on fatherhood, there seems to be a movement toward describing the father's activity and involvement in terms of non-gender-specific formulations. A major question that needs to be addressed in the fatherhood literature, "Are there attributes, skills, or knowledge that only a male can bring to the parenting mix?" This topic becomes especially important if one considers life-span issues. The suggestion has been made that as the child gets older the father has certain social or human capital resources available to him that mothers typically do not have.

This topic of gender differences in parenting has been approached in the literature on parents' play behavior with their children. It was originally thought that in the early years of the child's life fathers played more with their children than did mothers. It was argued that the father's rough and tumble play behavior was a unique contribution to the child's development. However, as Lamb (1997) points out, while fathers do initiate more physical play with their children as a proportion of their total interaction time with children, research shows that mothers play more with children overall, just less in proportion to the total amount of time they spend with children. Lamb (1997) suggests that fathers may play with children more than they do other activities with them because they are at home much less of the time and need to provide exciting games and contact with the child to compensate.

The question of gender differences in parenting is an important research topic that has not received the attention it deserves. There are several important questions that need to be asked: Do fathers and mothers have some genetically driven differential traits? Are there certain skills or knowledge attached to gender-specific traits? Are there certain developmental windows when the father's set of traits, skills, and abilities are critical to the child's well-being? Is the father more likely to be connected to the world of social capital, and when he is not there to transmit those

connections and introductions to the public world is the child necessarily disadvantaged as a result? As another possibility, are there simply so many tasks in daily family life that it takes four hands to get most of them completed? In other words, perhaps gender is not the issue at all, but instead, the issue is the need for more than one parent at home, with the gender of the second parent being irrelevant.

On the other side of the coin, is it fair to judge fathers' involvement with children using the same scale and measurement that one uses to assess mothers' involvement (Day & Mackey, 1989)? In sum, research needs to address the question of whether fathers are (1) one of two parents who can and do perform essentially the same tasks (albeit mothers generally do more of them), with gender being irrelevant or (2) parents with a specific gendered parent role and with unique gender-based style, skills, attributes, personality, and/or abilities that are central to the development of the child.

Motivation

One of the key questions addressed by fatherhood scholars is why a man would choose (or not choose) to participate in the biological creation of a child and, once the child is born, why would he decide to continue his contact with the mother and child, especially when the turbulence and trouble of family life arise. Men have a variety of views about why they participate in biological paternity and/or the subsequent involvement in their children's lives. The desire to procreate is intertwined with the desire for companionship, the need to fulfill a societal expectation of becoming an economic provider, and the need to become a "responsible" father (Marsiglio, 1995a; Tanfer & Mott, 1997). For the most part, conceptions of what it means to be a father are motivated and shaped by cultural images of fatherhood. It has been suggested by the Committee on Conceptualizing Male Parenting (1997) that some of the primary reasons that men are motivated to become fathers are:

1. To have the experience of caring for and raising children,
2. To build stronger bonds with their romantic partners,
3. To fulfill a social role expectation,
4. To feel connected to other kin and family,
5. To express genuine love for children, and
6. To provide for children, thus fulfilling a sense of responsibility.

Motivation can come from a variety of sources and have sundry impacts. First, it can come from the definitional and expectational domain of cultural and structural context. As a man watches television, reads stories, and sees other men in action, he forms a generalized idea about his own performance in the father role based on his summary and critique of what he sees in his culture. Second, his idea about being a father may be shaped by observing the results of his own involvement with children. He may be motivated to adjust his level of efficacy or performance if he is at all perceptive and has adequate monitoring skills. The motivation comes from seeing the results of a good job or

poor one. Third, motivation may come from as of yet little understood internal biological mechanisms that predispose him to be involved. In addition, there may be times (especially in agrarian cultures) when he is motivated to be involved because there is an economic value added for more effective father performance. He may, for example, extract greater productivity from children when he is more attentive to their needs.

Researchers such as Cowan, Cowan, and Kerig (1993) and Grossman, Pollack, and Golding (1988) have made careful efforts to isolate and identify the psychological attributes that motivate men as they take on the role of father. Based on this work and the research of Jacobs (1995) and Larson, Richards, and Perry-Jenkins (1994), several important aspects of men's motivations to become an involved parent emerge. First, the primary motivation stems from a desire either to repudiate or to reproduce the experience they had as a child. Some men become "transitional characters" (Burr, Day, Bahr, 1995). This means that the experiences they had as children were perceived as undesirable, and they make a 180 degree change and go in the opposite direction of their parents. Others had strong positive experiences and wish to re-enact the world of their own childhood.

While Larson, Richards, and Perry-Jenkins (1994) also indicate that many fathers express pleasure in being around their children and a desire to continue, Gerson (1993) suggests that the provisioning aspects of the fathering role may be the primary motivational factor for men. Men assume that when they are doing that job well they are fulfilling the fatherhood role. At any rate, this is an area that needs much further research. We need more research in which men are asked how they perceive the role of father. For example, do they see the defender, provider, and nurturer roles as more or less important than doing daily childcare tasks (changing diapers, etc.)?

The sociobiological push. There is a growing body of literature that suggests much of what we do in families is directed by genetic propensities. The desire to father could be driven or directed, at least in part, by genetic predisposition. That fathers around the world have many of the same types of behaviors regardless of cultural training is at least suggestive evidence that men may be prodded by a biological drive. In the mid-1980s Mackey (1985) wrote a series of articles in which he suggested that the sociobiological genetic prototype for modern fathers is the wolf. He proposed that there exists in evolved man a residual genetic structure that can be seen in wolf behavior. Wolves are one of the few mammals in which the male parent hunts, eats, and then brings the food (in the form of regurgitation) back to the pups. Through this animal-based metaphor, Mackey suggests that men feel a sense of responsibility which is in turn expressed in their efforts to provide for children (Mackey, 1985). As with most of the research on fathers, this sociobiological area of inquiry is still in its infancy, but it does provide us with another view into male parenting behavior.

Intergenerational motivations. An important principle of family life is the

intergenerational aspect of parenting. We pass to our children who we are and what we believe. Many suggest that this process is not optional (Burr, Day, and Bahr, 1995) and is a process in which one cannot avoid participating. These generational messages help define the child's identity, future role performance (even as a future parent), how they view the world (e.g., as a safe place or one to be feared), and their motivation to enter future adult roles such as work and becoming parents themselves (Gadsden & Hall, 1996).

It is clear that fathers' relationships with sons and daughters are a critical force in children's lives. For example, Arditti (1991) has shown that the level of paternal involvement increases the ability of parents to transmit values and beliefs about sexuality and sexual behavior to their children. The more the fathers were involved generally with their children, the more likely the children were to adopt the values, beliefs, and desired behaviors of the father with regard to sexuality.

Nydegger and Mitteness (1991) describe a unique intergenerational process in which fathers not only teach their sons how to make the transition into the adult world but how to share in the adult world. This study ties strongly to the motivational construct and suggests several important research directions. First, fathers perceive their responsibility and motivation differently depending on the gender of the child. According to this research they sense a need to pass different things on to boys than they do to girls. For girls, they have more of a sense of protection, and for boys an intent to socialize them into the public realm. Second, men seem to understand the calculus that when they are more involved they are more likely to pass their ideologies, beliefs, resources, and values onto the next generation. Additionally, when they are involved positively they are more likely to pass on the desire to be an effective parent to the next generation.

Economic theoretical explanations. Three demographic/economic trends in the last half of the 20th century have turned our attention to the role of economics in fathering. These are (1) the growth of nonmarital fertility, (2) increased divorce rates, and (3) significant increases in the numbers and proportions of children living in female-headed households. When combined, this triad of demographic changes in the nature and composition of families living in the U.S. has generated economic speculation about what motivates fathers to (dis)engage from family life.

In early economic models of fertility (Becker, 1960, 1991; Willis, 1973), the primary role assigned to the father was that of breadwinner. The husband and wife were thought to make joint decisions about how many children to have and the level of family investment that would be directed into each child's education, health, and general well-being. Additionally, it was assumed that one of the more important choices families make is how time is allocated between work and household production. A series of insightful papers by Willis and Weiss (1985, 1993, and 1996) show that a father's financial involvement in the lives of children is a calculus based on the premise that

children's well-being is a *collective good*. That is, while the parents are separate actors, the welfare of the child is a common interest. When it is to the advantage of partners to pool their resources, they get and stay married and invest in their children.

Willis and Weiss suggest that children are a collective good because an increase in the welfare of the child increases the utility of both parents. This notion runs counter to the prevailing idea that children are now a liability where they were once an asset. In the case of divorce or nonmarital birth, the father must funnel his resources through the mother, and his contribution becomes diluted. Willis and Weiss argue that if the father offers child support to the mother, she has the power to determine the end amount actually spent on the children since he is not there to monitor its expenditure. The father's marginal cost of increasing the child's welfare by one dollar costs him two dollars if the mother splits the amount given her into personal and child directed consumption. The authors propose that this frequently happens and creates a disincentive. Willis and Weiss (1985) also show that if the father knows that the mother is not using all of the allocation for the child's support, then he will continue to contribute only if the mother is sufficiently low in resources to place the child in financial jeopardy.

In summary, the motivations of fatherhood are many and complex. The father's role is shaped and formed by his personal history with his own father, cultural expectations, economic expectations, and perhaps even inner biological predispositions. These motivations filter and format his enactment of the father role. Unfortunately, we know very little about how culture and history configure and determine the way in which the father ultimately fulfills that role.

Enactment/Involvement

The concept of role enactment refers to how one takes the expectations of a particular role and then fulfills (or does not fulfill) that role in an efficacious way. Enactment connotes the action element of the fatherhood role (Palkovitz, 1997; Lamb, 1997). Enactment suggests the dynamic and interactive character of fatherhood. The term enactment reminds us that the father is proactively doing: he is caring, providing, provisioning, "*chauffeuring*," baiting hooks, catching balls, assisting with homework, praying, fixing dinner, changing diapers, and mending a broken toy (see Palkovitz, 1997 for an expanded list of activities fathers discharge as they enact the fatherhood role). This list of activities also reminds us that the contexts have a significant impact on one's motivation to participate positively in the fatherhood role. The contexts have an important role in forming and shaping the enactment. What a father does with his child is shaped not only by his motivation to perform the father role but also by his perception of what a father ought to do. Further, the contexts may be a directly intervening process. For example, the father may not have access to his children as a result of a decision by the legal system. In turn, the decision by the legal system was shaped by the contexts of our culture and society.

Recent research on enactment of the father role has focused mainly on paternal involvement with children. The first attempts at answering the question of how involved fathers are focused on time use. In these studies (Lamb, Pleck, Charnor, and Levine 1985; Pleck, Lamb, and Levine 1986; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine, 1987), it was proposed that paternal involvement included three components: (1) engagement (child-parent interaction), (2) level of accessibility or availability, and (3) responsibility for the child's care. To assess these aspects of involvement, "time diaries" were used on nationally representative samples of parents from which fathers' time spent with children could be measured.

One compelling and important line of research from these data collection efforts is the methodological work done by McBride (1990) and McBride and Mills (1993). While their categories of interaction are very similar to those of Lamb and his colleagues, they make an important distinction with regard to workday versus non-workday interactions. They propose that it is critical to separate times when men are precluded from being with a child from those when they can be there.

Another important methodological advancement can be found in the work of Radin (1994). Her work centers on the Paternal Index of Child Care Involvement (PICCI) scale and assesses five components of interaction: (1) statement of involvement, (2) childcare, (3) socialization, (4) influence in child-related responsibilities, and (5) accessibility. Another important feature of this work is that she attempts to measure more than just time with the child. She measures time that builds and facilitates the child's development or enhances the child's skills and abilities. This follows from the suggestion by Belsky (1984) that researchers need to attend to "growth-facilitating parenting." In other words, parenting is more effective when it enables children's capabilities and capacities. An important methodological advance that has occurred in the last ten years is a movement from simply counting "hours spent" to measuring the quality and substance of the parent-child interactions. While we know that positive paternal involvement does enhance children's well-being in many areas, we know very little from these research efforts about how combinations of these paternal activities may aggregate to facilitate better outcomes. This is an important research question that needs examining.

Pleck (1997) reports that fathers' proportional involvement is about two-fifths of mothers' (43.5%). Fathers' levels of time spent with children and accessibility are significantly higher with younger children than with adolescents. According to Pleck (1997), studies show that when fathers can be there and are not precluded by work, they interact with their children about 1.9 hours on workdays and 6.5 hours on non-workdays. If the child is a teen the numbers drop to .5 hour on workdays and 1.4 to 2 hours on non-workdays. Fathers of teens spend more time with sons than daughters.

There are many ways in which a father's influence may be felt once he is there. The following segment covers an important body of

research that leads us to examine the nature of interaction when fathers are present. The work of Lamb, Pleck, Rodin, and McBride has shown us that fathers who are in the lives of children on a daily basis provide significant advantage to the well-being of the child. The emerging theoretical work on social capital indicates how fathers may be able to transmit the resources they control to their children when they are with their children.

Social capital. As families change and transform throughout the life cycle, family members must turn to whatever resources are available to meet the challenges, turbulence, and crises that face them. For children, it is usually the parents who are the primary resource bank from which response assets are drawn. Hence, children's well-being is tied closely to the quantity and quality of those resources (Amato, 1997). Coleman (1988) suggests that family resources can be divided into human, financial, and social capital. Only recently have researchers wondered how a father's human and social capital influence the well-being of his children.

Human capital refers to skills, knowledge, and dispositions that enable family members to attain their stated and implicit goals (Becker, 1991). Examples of human capital include math, verbal, and communication skills, along with such qualities as effective work habits, knowledge of normative dress and speech habits, and ability to seek, obtain, and maintain employment. This latter skill focuses on the ability to stay on work tasks, self-monitor work behavior, and self-regulate appropriate workplace demeanor. It is supposed that effective parenting involves the ability to transmit and teach human capital skills by modeling those attributes and by direct teaching in work-like settings.

Financial capital refers to the goods and/or experiences that can be produced with available income. Thinking of financial capital as only the amount in the bank account is too limiting; the willingness of the family to transfer that income for the well-being of the child is an essential element. Foa (1971) called this a "grants economy" in which family members "invest" in other family members. The father, for example, chooses to spend his vacation time and allotted money taking his family to a city where there are museums and educational activities as opposed to doing an activity that focuses more specifically on his hobbies or wants. Likewise, he chooses to purchase books or a computer that will primarily be used for school work instead of some item that enhances his own leisure time.

Social capital is another type of resource available in families. Social capital refers to the relationships among family members and between family members and the community that have beneficial effects on the child's emotional, educational, cognitive, and social development. Social capital within the family can be broken into two segments: the co-parental relationship and the relationship between parent and child (Amato, 1997). Coleman (1990) suggests that it takes at least two interacting parents to provide "dyadic resources." Dyadic resources emerge as a feature of the relationship

between two parents who then have a relationship to the child. For example, the two adults can model for the child a number of important life skills such as how to give emotional support, how to show respect, how to work through a difficult life situation, and how to communicate effectively with one another.

Additionally, when parents have a cooperative relationship they are able to generate a united parenting front to the children. Social capital theory suggests that when parents are inconsistent and have disparate views on such things as household rules, discipline, and the flow of family events, it is harder for children to learn the more complex community/social patterns of behavior and internalize the attending social norms and values associated with successful social negotiation. Such children also have difficulty understanding the nature of hierarchical systems and feel little need to respond flexibly to those in charge (Nock, 1988).

We learn from Coleman's social capital model that these resources and the transference of them to children represent a process. It is not sufficient to measure parental resources such as income and education. Whether and how the resources are transferred to children and the resulting impact on the child's well-being are the most important issues. Further, it is critical to assess the quality of the relationships between and among family members. For example, does the transfer of capital occur differently when parents have stronger and more viable relationships with their children? As Coleman and many others have suggested, the ways in which parents facilitate and enact family life in the microcosm becomes a richly textured metaphor for the child as he/she enters the macrocosm of social life and then recreates the microcosm that becomes the next family unit. In addition, Coleman has suggested that the strength and quality of the relationship between the father and child may be the defining mechanism through which financial, human, and social capital is transmitted from one generation to the next.

One implication of this research is the need to re-evaluate time-use studies to assess fathering. As noted above, studies looking at paternal involvement commonly track the amount of time fathers spend with their children. The social capital theory would suggest that time spent with the child is not nearly as important a measure as the quality of the relationship between parents, between parents and child, and between the modeling and resource transfer that take place in those interactional dyads.

There have been several excellent studies that have pursued various aspects of the social capital model. Amato (1997) proposed and demonstrated that education is a central predictor of income (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991) and that, in turn, education and income positively influence children's social capital as reflected in the quality of the co-parental relationship (also see Conger *et al.*, 1992) and the relationship between father and child (Amato, 1997; Conger *et al.*, 1992). Based on a careful review of the literature and extensive data analysis, Amato argues that "fathers influence their children's well-being through a

combination of human, financial, and social capital" (Amato, 1997, p. 36). He further states that "an uncooperative, conflict-ridden relationship between fathers and mothers is detrimental to multiple aspects of offsprings' well-being." (Amato, 1997, p. 36). He suggests that it is the relationships between spouses and between parent and child that determine the ability of the family to transfer social, human, and financial capital to children successfully.

Family processes. One area of research that is only now emerging is family process research (Committee on Father Involvement, 1997). It is becoming clear to researchers that to understand the engagement, enactment, and involvement of fathers one must understand the nature of dyadic and triadic relationships that exist within a family "behind closed doors." Family process informs us about how family members think, feel, and act toward one another (Broderick, 1993; McKenry & Price, 1994). Most researchers assume that to understand the nature of family process one must advance theory and methodology about social fatherhood to include the multiple perceptions family members have. Most of the research on men in families takes a psycho-individualistic approach and extrapolates from one person's perception and generalizes that perception to the whole family (Gavazzi, 1994b).

Family process describes the ongoing dynamics of interaction found within the family unit. This approach also assumes that most of what happens within families is covert. The processes may not be apparent even to the family members themselves. It is proposed that only through the study of multiple perceptions can researchers begin to highlight the unseen. Family process researchers also assume that families build patterns of interaction that are recurring. Each family develops "scripts" or short, well-rehearsed scenarios for a variety of daily problems, decisions, and rule-setting activities. Over time, a researcher can observe these redundancies, but most of the time the family is relatively unaware of them. Families are also hierarchically structured, and the rules they make reflect known or invisible power structures that drive the interactions. These rules (and the redundancies) inform us about who is in charge of what, who should do what, and who can change the rules. Often the rules and patterns of interaction alert us to gendered power differences within the family unit.

An examination of scholarly family process literature reveals only a few recurring family process themes. From the larger list of family processes only two examples will be discussed in depth here: *distance regulation* (i.e., enmeshment, individuation, boundary definition, triangulation, and family intrusiveness) and *flexibility* (i.e., adaptability and coping). A short list of other family process constructs not discussed here includes supervision/ monitoring (which includes rule setting, rule implementation [Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983]); affection (which includes levels of generosity, caring, loving, and kindness [Burr *et al.*, 1995]); communication; support; trust; and ritualization.

Little research to date focuses on fathers' specific contributions to family processes. The

selected family processes discussed below have a research tradition and clear methodologies for acquiring data on mothers' and fathers' contributions to child well-being. Even so, little work has been done to specify parental gender differences with respect to family process. One exception is the work on power differences in families. Differentials in power between parents (when there are two) greatly influence the family dynamics as decisions are made, resources allocated, and goals attained.

1. Distance regulation Family distance regulation is defined as the amount of individuality and the amount of intimacy that are tolerated within a family system (Gavazzi, 1993). Distance regulation in the family has received increased theoretical and clinical attention in recent years, especially regarding families with adolescents (Allison & Sabatelli, 1988; Anderson & Sabatelli, 1990; Sabatelli & Mazor, 1985). Most of this research focuses on parent-child relationships, but few studies examine how distance regulation may differ according to the gender of the parent or child. Nevertheless, distance regulation strategies between parent (father and/or mother) and child vary greatly among families with differing outcomes.

Specifically, researchers have suggested that how parents regulate distance within family boundaries greatly influences the child's ability to make a successful and effective transition to a post-adolescent status (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989; Lapsley, 1993). In essence, distance regulation is the mechanism by which parents promote or retard the development of appropriate child autonomy. One researcher speaks of family distance regulation as the primary mechanism that defines the bonding and buffering processes (Broderick, 1993) associated with healthy functioning in the family with adolescents.

Distance regulation contains two primary dimensions: (1) the family's tolerance for individuality, or the relative tolerance the system displays for each member to experience a sense of separateness from the family, and (2) the family's tolerance for intimacy, or the relative tolerance the system displays for members to be connected emotionally and psychologically to the family (Gavazzi, 1993). Distance regulation patterns that tolerate both individuality and intimacy within the family create a well-differentiated family system. If the distance regulation patterns display high tolerance for only one dimension—individuality or intimacy—the family is thought to have a moderate level of differentiation. Here, families that retain a sense of intimacy but do not tolerate individuality well are "enmeshed," whereas families that tolerate individuality among their members without retaining a sense of intimate belonging are "disengaged" (Minuchin, 1974). Finally, distance regulation patterns that tolerate neither individuality claims nor intimacy within the family are poorly differentiated (Gavazzi et al., 1994).

Individual family members contribute to family differentiation through their multiple interactions with other members of the family, as each member does have his or her own personal experiences of the family system. By

definition, however, no one individual family member can have a separate level of family differentiation. Further, the level of family differentiation is not a mere sum of each member's contribution to the family system, but rather is a system level construct that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Parallel concepts include the consideration of boundary maintenance, whereby healthy functioning in the family with adolescents is thought to hinge on flexible family boundaries that allow adolescent members to move continuously into and out of the system (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). Triangulation is another related concept. Here, two family members involved in a conflict (usually the parents) begin to involve a third member of the family (usually one of their children) in order to decrease the tension and anxiety experienced as a result of the conflict. Such triangulation over time is related to psychological impairment and acting-out behavior in children and adolescents, including internalizing disorders and runaway behaviors (Gavazzi & Blumenkrantz, 1991).

2. Flexibility A growing body of family-process literature examines the amount of flexibility families display in response to internal and external demands for change. In essence, it is believed that families able to demonstrate greater flexibility in the face of demands for change will respond in more healthy ways, and thus will be able to meet the needs of individual members. This literature refers to a number of constructs related to flexibility in the family, including constructs familiar to scholars in other areas of family research. Among these are adaptability, family problem-solving ability, and family coping styles (see Anderson & Gavazzi, 1990 for a review of this literature). Adaptability refers to the degree to which members are able to change the power structure, relationship rules, and roles in relation to developmental and/or situational stressors. Problem-solving abilities in the family involve the ability of its members to resolve both instrumental and affective difficulties. Coping in the family concerns the degree to which members respond to calls for change through direct action, reframing a difficult situation in ways that make it more manageable, and/or controlling the amount of stress and anxiety generated by the difficult situation.

In sum, the new areas of research opened up by the family process theory and social capital theory promise to enlarge our understanding of paternal involvement and the enactment of the father role. However, few studies guided by family process theories have focused specifically on the father's role. Much work remains to be done in these promising areas of research.

Conclusions

The research on social fatherhood is complex, compelling, and vital to our understanding of family well-being. It is especially pertinent to the study of well-being in children. Initially, researchers used a simple explanatory model attempting to associate paternal presence/absence with isolated child outcomes. More recently, researchers and

theorists have considered fathers' motivations, contexts, involvement, and enactment of the paternal role with greater complexity. Unfortunately, the collection of data to fill out this amplified theoretical model of fatherhood is limited. Larger family data collection efforts, such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, include very few questions about fathers' involvement. In fact, in most of the available national data sets, presence/absence of men in households is almost all that is asked about fathers. Additionally, the Census and other government initiatives to collect family data have avoided this topic and, for the most part, collect data from and about women in households.

With the advent of the devolution of the welfare system, we need to raise a clarion call for systematic research about fatherhood in families. Since poverty has been a defining characteristic of many African American urban communities for many decades, and given that we know very little about men's roles in these families, the topic of fathering in these families is of particular importance and deserves immediate research priority.

The research on fatherhood has broadened in the last twenty years. In the 1970s, Lamb declared that fathers were the "forgotten parent." That does not seem to be the case today. As we enter the next century, research on social fatherhood will, I predict, gain a higher level of prominence and visibility. One of the contexts for fatherhood that may change in the near future is the cultural norm about a father's involvement/enactment. As LaRossa (1988) has indicated, the cultural definition of fatherhood (at least by upper-middle-class authors and researchers) is changing to reflect an enactment role that is very involved and active. It is possible that economic and policy pressures will assist this trend and move fathers closer to children.

There is a clear need for researchers and theorists to enrich our understanding of the relationship between men's motivations and the actual enactment of the fathering role. We know very little about how these motivations may change over the life cycle, vary by subculture, and be expressed in family structural conditions. Following the lead of Palkovitz (1997) we also need to expand the contexts that we count as part of the enactment of fatherhood. There are a multitude of ways in which fathers can participate actively in children's lives, and researchers are only beginning to explore them.

An important question that has not been resolved is whether men's contribution in families has a unique aspect to it. Are gender differences in parenting a matter of culture, choice, and preference or of innate skill and inherited propensity? Is there a mother template to which fathers must measure up? Or, is there a parent template that both parents must achieve if effective parenting is to occur? Of course, the third possibility is that there is a mother template for parenting *and* a father template. This question can only be answered with careful and systematic research.

There is a great need for more theory development and longitudinal research about African American fathers. For a variety of

cultural and methodological reasons, African American males are rarely studied in the context of the family. As we continue to foster the idea of embracing diversity, we need to recognize the rich cultural differences that permeate our society. Just as we know little about the mother/father templates for parenting, we know even less about cultural contexts and templates for parenting in different cultural settings.

Surprisingly, we know very little about why men choose (or do not choose) to parent actively once a child is born. We need to study the motivations that move men in and out of families. Additionally, we need to understand the barriers that preclude men from being in children's lives. This is a very underdeveloped area of research and one that will have direct application to the effort to strengthen families.

Finally, we need research on the fathering role guided by the two relatively new theories of social capital and family processes. The theory of social capital emphasizes that family interaction styles greatly influence the transmission of resources from parent to child. Research in this field points to the great significance of the father-child relationship in determining the transmission of human, social, and financial capital to the child.

Research in the family process field rarely provides an analysis of the gender of the parent. We know little about fathers' specific role in distance regulation and flexibility within the family. This line of research has great potential. For example, by understanding the mechanisms of interaction, we can design better ways of assisting fathers as they choose to be more involved in close familial relationships. The need for family process research is particularly acute in the study of adolescents and fathers. The child-father dynamic for teens is one of the least understood areas in the fathering literature.

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